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## RELIGION: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace

(BMICH - Panel Discussion)

*Professor Dhammavihari Thera*

Madam Chairperson, Professor Kraybill, Distinguished Members of the Panel,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me begin by taking a closer look at the title of the Panel Discussion this evening. It reads **RELIGION: Source of Conflict, Resource for Peace**. In English, it reads well and indeed looks jolly smart.

We are compelled to observe here that underlying this is a **gross error of globalisation**. Here is a typical example of **importation of western thinking to the east**. Here, in this case, it is **religious** thinking. But it happens all the time, in all areas like political, economic etc. etc. The logic of our eastern thinking pushes us to conclude that if **Religion is the source of Conflict**, we need **to expel it out of our society completely** to achieve peace as its opposite. Or radically change the

### **concept of Religion.**

Awareness of more than two and a half millennia of our religious history, spreading across the whole of Asia, from east to west, make us as Buddhists, reject the first half of the title of the panel discussion **RELIGION: Source of Conflict**. It is no more than a one-eyed view, possibly with the telescope on the blind etc, seen by people who wish to believe that they alone have a right to exist in this civilized world and the existence of none other ever matters. My very simple question to the panel is, **At what point in known history do you undertake this search or research?**

Why not say more precisely that **CONFLICT** in the world is not generated by religion, but by the arrogance and aggressiveness piled upon religion by the so-called religious men who propagate it. This applies well and truly to more than one single world religion. Just run the eye over the pages of history. Have you ever had a peep at the **Oxford University Press, Chicago 1994 publication entitled Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft?**

Buddhism as a religion is not delivered to mankind as a mandate from heaven to chosen people. This heavenly gifting is the beginning of religious arrogance, of the conceit of heaven favored chosen people. This inevitably and invariably brings into play **the law of right to fight for survival**. One is immediately called upon religiously to have one's eyes open to identify the infidels and the disbelievers, just the other fellow ! And to deal with him as religiously enjoined.

It is not stretching the point any bit too far to say that all imperialist invaders to this part of the world, the Portuguese, the Dutch and whoever else they be, came here with the conviction, undoubtedly ingrained in them by their religious cultures, that those who were religiously different from them and their long cherished religious cultures had to be totally destroyed. Believe it or not, this is the older and more barbaric form of the more recent search **for weapons of mass destruction**. At this stage, it is vitally important to indicate that some world

religions need, in all sincerity and magnanimous philanthropy to launder their religious history of the not too distant past.

So we say with deep conviction Get your focus correct and look for the source of conflict in the right place. Buddhism has, from its very inception, preached for peace and harmony amidst all living things in the cosmos. This anticipates, more than two and a half millennia ago, the need to safeguard the entire ecosystem in whose midst we are placed. The Buddhist respect for all forms of life begins here. We do not ever pray for divine sanction to destroy any form of life, in peace or war, human or animal. No matter for whose sake. We boldly challenge it.

Accommodating religion within the folds of the human community as a totality, without any exploitative desire to build power blocks on earth in the name of heaven or heavens above, religions shall develop on earth a comprehensive policy on earth for man, irrespective of caste creed differences or divergent political ideologies. Buddhism's fundamental theory of basic moral goodness of man is more than adequate for universal peace globally.

Conflicts in the human community in the world today are primarily traceable to three main areas, namely ethnic [with devastating tribal subdivisions within them], religious [with equally warring hostile sects] and gigantic political global power blocks [where kissing goes by favor, making unthinkable alliances during world crises]. The Great Berlin Wall [no longer in existence], the division of India and Pakistan and even more recently, the disastrous events in Bosnia lend proof to this. Let an unquestionable degree of honesty go into the question as we endeavor to resolve these conflict situations anywhere. We need a little more than religion, at least religions where we pray to the good sense of man, down here on earth in our own midst.



## Concept of LOVE in Buddhism

Bishop's College Educational Discussion

Long long ago in the history of the world, well before the origin of the English language, the Buddha gave to mankind the concept of LOVE. It is something down to earth, without any affiliations to persons or places beyond this living world which is known to us and seen by us. According to Buddhist teachings, love must stretch across from the human heart, horizontally to every other living thing in the cosmos, man and bird and beast. It means being friendly towards the entire ecosystem, without any discrimination whatsoever. In Buddhism, the equivalent of **love** is *mettā* or *maitrī*. Its meaning is friendliness, i.e. **the state of being a friend**. It implies total absence of enmity and hostility towards another.

Leaving aside the concept of love for a moment, we got to reckon with the fact that the **absence of friendliness** or love as we call it, results in the production of vulgar and violent basic human motivations like enmity and hostility, resulting in wars and invasions in the world as mass movements. At individual personal levels, it produces murders and massacres. The driving force behind such activities is, more often than not, arrogance and claims of superiority generated individually or collectively through ethnic identities, religious loyalties and political ideologies.

Myths of both the east and the west, India and the western world, have chosen to link love with eroticism. They invariably combine love with sex, unmindful as to which generates which. Hence their production of mythical characters like Eros, Cupid and Ananga. In their world of art, painting and sculpture, they present their Lord of Love as piercing the human heart with

arrows, call them whatever you will as flower darts or any other. Love does and must precede sex and exist well ahead of it.

In Buddhism, *mettā* or the **premier concept of friendliness in love** heals and comforts the human heart. It never bleeds, the lover or the loved. It is the primary basis which guarantees the survival and continuance of all life. Anywhere and everywhere, this concept of love or *mettā* is always lofty, noble and magnanimous. As Buddhists when we say in our spiritual culture *Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*, our theme always is **May all beings be well and happy**.

**True love** as presented in the Buddhist concept of *mettā* alone is capable of generating in the world **Peace on earth and goodwill among men**. Professor Dhammavihari 20<sup>th</sup> September 2004



## Buddhist Moral Re-Armament / Youth Group

*Bhikkhu Dhammavihari*

We the undersigned stand up for moral goodness in society in the interest of human uplift and well-being. We are Sinhala Buddhist girls from Sri Lanka, now living in New Zealand. For us, society is a thoroughly integrated community, embracing harmoniously within it both sexes, namely men and women. As Buddhists, we highly venerate the gender roles played both by men and women. It is with the highest possible degree of honesty and an equally commendable degree of sincerity that the Buddha is seen elevating the role of woman as the progenitor of human society. Even of the test-tube babies, it is she who handles the growth process of the fertilized egg. A for her contribution for the emotional and intellectual growth of a child, both at pre-natal and post-natal stages, more

than enough has been convincingly stated.

Once the men and women, i.e. the male and the female of the human community, of all ages at that, are harmoniously integrated, without hostility, jealousy and rivalry which are derivatively and mischievously generated through ill-conceived notions of equal pay, equal wages etc., mutual respect among them is invariably germinated and healthy and vigorous sprouts of inter-personal relationships are seen growing and extending themselves in diverse directions. We appreciate that the wealth of Buddhist culture which we inherit from birth contributes immensely to foster these values. We also reckon that the life style of the humans, of both sexes and of all divergent age groups, is being gradually subject to corrosion in the face of the world's scientific and technological advances.

We believe that universal loving kindness or *mettā* which is recommended in Buddhism as the basis of salvation for mankind must be made the starting point of all good morality among the humans.



## **The Message of Buddhism as a Religion to Mankind**

Birmingham University Students Lecture

Buddhism is not the product of some one's visit to earth with a heavenly message from somewhere. Siddhartha Gautama of India who is credited as the founder of Buddhism was the son of a rice-growing chieftain in the Himalayan slopes, born in Kapilavastu in the sixth century B.C. At the age of twenty-nine, he had come to know enough of the life of humans in the world he lived in through what he had himself observed, and through what others had already traditionally

said and done. Siddhartha inherited a vast Indian religious tradition.

At twenty-nine, as a householder and a father with a young son, Siddhartha had a new pre-enlightenment vision which showed him human life from a new dimension. He refused to accept human life and the experience humans go through from a creationist angle. Life exists in the universe. Its first beginnings are not discernible, he said. The serious problem is that its continuance is utterly painful, with what it brings in its wake, like decay, disease and death, together with all its psychological problems.



## **History of Buddhism in India**

**[Unity in Diversity in Early Buddhist Thinking]**

(Bombay Conference - 2008)

*Professor Dhammavihari Thera*

Sangha Nayaka [Honoris Causa]

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My presentation to you is not going to be a narration of the complete chronological history of Buddhism in India, giving you details about the kings who patronized Buddhism and about the kingdoms in which Buddhism flourished. During its long continuance in India, its history has been chequered, having had to face both patronage and persecution. At the same time, it must also be remembered that Buddhism, pioneering in the line of world religions and getting a lead of almost five hundred years over its nearest successor has yielded some unique distinguishing features of its own out of a consideration of which, the

world in crisis today, can benefit a great deal.

I shall lay special emphasis on some of these, like 1. the Buddha's courageous rejection of the creation theory, 2. *samsāric* continuance of human life through time and space, 3. moral goodness in the world and the personal responsibility of the human individual towards its build-up and continuance. The founder of Buddhism was indeed born an Indian, and perhaps for that reason a Hindu. In his moving out at the age of twenty-nine, out of his father's house where he was born and bred, he moved out of that inherited threshold of beliefs and practices with a challenge, looking out for an interpretation of life and a way of living with greater appeal and acceptability. This is what the Pali suttas refer to as Siddhartha's triumphant Noble Quest or *Ariya-Pariyesana* [See MN. 160-75]. Therefore the statement that is being perpetuated that 'the Buddha was born a Hindu, lived a Hindu and died a Hindu' has to crumble to the ground as an unfounded guess-work speculation.

The great maestro of world religions, Siddhartha Gautama or Sakyamuni Buddha of India, antedating as it were the genesis of Christianity at least by five centuries, i.e. more than two and a half millennia ago, revealed to the world the concept that there can be Unity in Diversity in human thinking when it transcends its divisive weaknesses. In the traceable early times of religious thinking in India, we are inclined to believe, that there had been a concept of overall unity in the universe which seems to have had a far reaching impact on the human mind, with a consequent sense of authority over man. In the singing chants of ancient Indians of more than thousands of years ago, i.e. in Vedic hymns, we see man addressing powers whom he believed existed above him and were greater than himself in very liberal pluralistic terms. We call this phase of thinking in the Vedas polytheistic.

These came into realistic existence amidst the humans in the deification of natural phenomena like sun, rain and thunder, including both favourable and



unfavourable items. The sun came to be unmistakably deified as the indispensable great stimulator of life. He is severally called Surya and Savitā. The violently moving powerful element of water came to occupy his divine position as Varuna. The eminent god Indra as the personification of thunder and lightning is spoken of as releasing, for the benefit of man on earth below, the rain clouds which were believed to be cows trapped and imprisoned in the sky above by a mythical dragon called *vṛtra*. He, together with Varuna, became the guardians of the moral order or *Ṛta* in the universe as *Ṛtasya-gopau*. Parjanya as the rain god who also had thunder under his command, was referred to as hunting down the evil-doers in the world: *Parjanyaḥ stanayan hanti duṣkṛtaḥ*. Man knew why he wanted the gods. So in creating them, man assigned to each the role he could efficiently play with what he was equipped with, Parjanya with his killer thunder-bolt and Varuna with his ravaging waters. At times, each god was prayed to and addressed severally with veneration for various favours which man expected from above. He even prayed for his basic needs like wealth, heroic sons and food: *rayiṃ vīravatīm iṣam*. Prompted by even less religious, down-to-earth motives, they eulogised some of their gods even as destroying their enemies: *dasyor hantā*. This attitude of the worshipper towards his gods has latterly come to be referred by to Indologists as *kathenotheism* or veneration of each god in turn, according to one's need.

But behind all these lay one single motive, i.e. fulfilment of man's day to day needs and the weal and welfare of mankind as a whole. If one talks in terms of a religious idiom, these ancient Indians are seen to have prayed to their gods for various favours and thanked them in turn profusely for what they received. They also paid them back regularly with gratitude and with well-addressed sacrificial gifts. This is more or less the graphic picture of the Indian religious background, with a coverage of several thousands of years in which Siddhartha Gautama appeared with his unassailable anthropocentric vision of man in the world and his salvation.

At the same time, it must also be remembered that Buddhism, pioneering in the line of world religions and getting a lead of almost five hundred years over its nearest successor, has yielded some unique distinguishing features of its own. Buddhism's totality of vision of life in the world, like the sixth century China's religio-philosophic vision of *tien hsia* [all that is beneath heaven] or *hsu hai ca nei* [all those within the four seas], without any divisive concepts of ethnic or territorial groupings within the larger human community, and without any sense of violently aggressive self-acquired leadership among them, pioneered the concept of friendship or non-hostility among all living things in the world.

This positive virtue, the Buddhists call universal friendliness or *mettā* [Skt. *maitrī*]. This is the absence of aggressive hostility of one to another, of individuals to individuals, of nations to nations, of ethnic groups to ethnic groups, and of religious hordes in one part of the world towards others elsewhere, even larger groups splitting up into competitive smaller sub-groups under new names and even invading newer countries everywhere in the world today.

The Jainas who are more or less senior contemporaries of Buddhism refer to this virtue of *maitri* negatively as non-violence or *ahiṃsā*. With both groups, this is a fundamental basic religious virtue and they extend it even up to the life of animals. The Buddhists are seen to have further combined both these positive and negative aspects dexterously and brought them together in the very second stage of their Eightfold Path of religious culture under 'well-structured patterns of religious thinking' or *sammā sankappa* which includes both *avyāpāda* [non-aggression] and *avihiṃsā* [non-injury] as items 2 and 3 within it. The Buddha himself tells his young son Rahula that in the development of friendliness or *mettā*, aggressiveness or *vyāpāda* disappears: *mettaṃ bhāvayato Rāhula yo vyāpādo so pahīyissati*.

In the then cultured world of more than twenty-five centuries ago this concept of 'love for all life' had to gain ground as an essential virtue within religious

cultures. But religions, in many instances, seem to have smuggled in, with the approval of divine powers, the disastrous notion of religious and national wars. History from different parts of the world today, almost from the dawn of the twentieth century, has begun to show us enough of the vaporisation of this quality of love and mercy from the hearts of degenerating racial blocks of humans and their religious thinking in the entire wiping out by them of smaller blocks like Armenians and Jews in different parts of the world, in wave after wave of brutality and bestiality. Heaven-inspired religious fanaticism and lunacy of race-superiority have unquestionably been at the root of these with man on earth.

The Buddhists have highlighted the basic importance of this quality of love by naming their future Buddha, who is believed to come to the world anew for the rescue and liberation of mankind as Metteyya [Skt. Maitreya. Miroku in Japanese]. Most likely, it is the impact of this humanitarian teaching of friendliness or *maitrī* in Buddhism that reversed Emperor Asoka's world-conquest policy or *dik-vijaya* to one of conquest via righteousness or *dharma vijaya*. Buddhist history has never known of any aggressive wars of bloody conquest, at any time, any where.

Born as the son of a rice-growing farmer named Suddhodana, who evidently was a village chieftain, Siddhartha first discovered, through his pre-enlightenment vision, the dreadful predicament in which the human was trapped in *saṃsāra*, i.e. his cyclical continuance through time and space. Deeply moved by this tragedy of the human, of birth incessantly followed by decay, disease and death, he ardently strove for the discovery of its origin, and a release or *nissarana* out of it, utilising his sound method of causal analysis.

He accepted the presence of man on earth as a reality. Who brought him here was not his question. Being born of parental union with bodies of flesh and blood, man had to face all changes of growth, decay, disease and death which the body had to go through. The powerful interplay of mind and body in man, i.e.

his *nāma-rūpa* and *viññāṇa* inevitably necessitated his being born again and again. But man himself had not known enough about this invariable process. He was therefore maladjusted to face the underlying law of change in life. The bitterness of impermanence and change, of being plunged from ownership to dispossession was far too drastic for man to believe and accept as realism of life. He naturally turned in the direction of persons and powers beyond himself as agents of these changes, particularly of the disastrous ones.

Out of an incredible range of beliefs which have crystalised into what is called religion, man began to create staggering sources of comfort and support, calling them the unknown and unseen divine powers. The courageous anthropocentric vision of the Buddha made him unhesitatingly declare that man had no person or place in the world where he could go to seeking refuge or protection: *attāno loko*. Nor was there any power besides man who could control and direct his destiny on earth: *anabhissaro* [See Raṭṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya - MN.].

This centrality which man received in his life in the universe and the consequent position of responsibility which came to be vested in him for the success or failure he brought upon himself, eliminated from the field of religion the humbled and degraded human attitude of prayer and supplication. Slaughter of animals for sacrificial offerings to hungry and angry gods had to become a thing of the past. But they did continue to be resorted to even in the newly emerging world religions for centuries afterwards. Even in the believed to be civilized, and knowledge-and wisdom-wise advanced world of today, some such acts of religious subservience to staggeringly overwhelming divine powers are being made.

Some years ago, it came to be globally known that about fifty full-grown oxen were slaughtered and a sacrificial offering made to propitiate an offended and angered god above for the offence of having tolerated on earth the presence of

the colossal Buddha statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan which up to that time had existed there for nearly two thousand years. It is for the sensible world of today, without any obsessions of religion, ethnicity or political ideologies, to review the necessity and the worth of continuing such believed to be penitentiary, yet monstrously offensive remedial offerings made in the name of inherited beliefs to appease unjustifiably angered and infuriated heavenly powers.

To a World Bank of magnanimous benevolent thinking there could not have been a better first investment than this concept of respect for all life, irrespective of caste creed differences, anywhere and everywhere. Jainism and Buddhism of India did make this contribution to the world more than two and a half millennia ago. Jainism's *ahimsā paramo dharmah* or Compassion is the Ultimate Ethic and Buddhism's *sukhino vā vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā* [i.e. May all life continue to dwell in security and in comfort] antedated what the U.N. did awaken to do twenty-five centuries later.

This laid the unassailable foundation for harmony among human, animal and plant life in the world. Not even remote traces of environmental pollution were to be detected in the distance. The pollution of the Great Lakes of America was by no means a heaven delivered punishment to correct man on earth. There is absolutely no mythical or legendary confusion about identifying this with the punishments sent down on Sodom and Gomorrah. The story about the destruction of the wet forests of South America, giving into man's high-handed arrogant and ambitious thinking, is not very different in origin. These blunders are now being seriously reviewed in public in critical research studies [See Frances M. Lappe's *Diet For A Small Planet ...*].

Our plea is that this re-assessment of the world situation, whether it be religious, ethnic or politically ideological, has to be seriously taken in hand. By whom is the question. It has to begin immediately without delay, while the devil's hand is still at work, and almost simultaneously every where. For nearly one

hundred years, everybody has now witnessed the aftermath of global wars, gorgeously carried out by strategically linked up Allies and Axis powers and more recently by strangely linked up alliances in the world, in defence of justice. The judgement day or the dooms day, by whatever name one chooses to call it, is apparently not too far in the distance.

